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Activities not classified by field: harmonization of indicators and reporting on progress towards the millennium development goals

Status of millennium development goal country reporting

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the status of millennium development goal country reporting. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-third session.[1] Points for discussion are included in paragraphs 10, 12 and 16.

* E/CN.3/2003/1.

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I. Background

1. In 2002, the Secretary-General issued his first annual report on progress in implementing the Millennium Declaration. It provides a global perspective on the status of the millennium development goals, based on internationally agreed indicators and using global and regional databases available within the United Nations system. Global monitoring of the millennium development goals is important for keeping actors accountable to agreed commitments but it does not necessarily identify development priorities or monitor progress in each individual country. Each country must set and implement its own priorities within the given framework of the millennium development goals.

2. The millennium development goals express the political consensus reached during the world summits and global conferences of the 1990s, reaffirmed at the Millennium Summit, held in 2000. They do not represent equally ambitious or feasible targets for all countries. For the millennium development goals to be meaningful at the national level, targets need to be tailored to reflect national circumstances and development priorities.

3. For the United Nations to play its role as millennium development goal "score-keeper" and "campaign manager" at the country level, UNDP is promoting and supporting the preparation of millennium development goal reports by national or subnational authorities, in very close coordination with the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). The millennium development goal country reports are a vehicle for keeping the national focus on agreed development priorities, keeping the public informed on progress, fostering debate and dialogue and triggering action to meet the tailored millennium development goal targets in each country. Millennium development goal country reports also provide the platform for improving donor coordination around nationally defined priorities. In October 2001, UNDG issued a guidance note on "Reporting on the millennium development goals at the country level" (available at www.undg.org).

II. Millennium development goal country reports

4. So far, 17 countries have issued millennium development goal reports: Albania, Armenia, Bolivia, Cambodia, Cameroon, Chad, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nepal, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, United Republic of Tanzania and Viet Nam (available at www.undg.org and www.undp.org). About another 50 are under preparation (see annex). The plan is for every developing and transition country to produce at least one millennium development goal country report by the end of 2004, in time for the Secretary-General's comprehensive review of the millennium development goal progress in 2005.

5. Millennium development goal country reports help to benchmark indicators, to identify national achievements and to address challenges and obstacles. They are vehicles for converting global goals into nationally agreed targets that balance ambition with realism. Over-ambitious targets are not likely to trigger action but rather add to scepticism and negativity, while non-challenging targets are unlikely to help to mobilize resources or foster pro-poor policy reforms. Nationally defined targets that reflect local circumstances are a way to balance ambition with feasibility and to build a grand coalition for action.

6. The preparation of millennium development goal reports should provide the opportunity to build national ownership around well-defined and pertinent targets. The first millennium development goal country reports were prepared and issued by the United Nations country team. More recent ones have been published jointly by the Government and the United Nations country team. The objective is to engage civil society organizations and academia in future millennium development goal reports. The first millennium development goal country reports contained rather mechanistic reporting on the global targets. More recent ones report on targets that have been tailored to what is relevant and realistic given the local circumstances and considering recent trends.

7. Tailored targets can only be set through an inclusive process of consultation and dialogue within the country. The United Nations can contribute to this process in two ways: by helping to create the space for such political consultations among the main actors, and by providing essential information so that all actors at the table can meaningfully participate in the debate for setting tailored millennium development goal targets.

8. Millennium development goal reports should be concise, attractive, easy-to-read and non-technical reports. They should contain clear messages, using simple graphical illustrations and colour maps. They should be issued in the local language(s) and not only in English. The reports are not the place for deep analysis or specific policy prescriptions, but for spelling out the current level and recent trend for each millennium development goal target. Their main purpose is to inform the wider public about how the country, the provinces and districts, different socio-economic and ethnic or gender groups are doing vis-à-vis agreed targets. If widely publicized and shared within the country, these reports will help to build a stronger constituency for these noble targets. They are also likely to foster collective action to narrow the remaining gaps and close disparities within the country.

9. Millennium development goal country reports should be based on existing data and analyses, contained in documents such as national development plans, poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), national human development reports and the common country assessments. Millennium development goal reports should not establish a parallel process for data-gathering and analyses.

III. The choice of indicators

10. Achieving the millennium development goals will depend on the adoption of national policies consistent with agreed targets within the aspirations of the Millennium Declaration. Global reporting on the millennium development goals is based on 48 internationally agreed indicators that represent the best use of data sources validated by specialized international organizations. The choice of some progress indicators at the national level might, in some cases, need to be supplemented and/or adapted to reflect national priorities and data availability. Monitoring the education goal, for instance, can include indicators on the quality of education and the percentage of children who complete primary school apart from the agreed millennium development goal indicators of the net enrolment ratio and the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5.

11. Nationally agreed targets should be expressed in the choice of nationally relevant indicators to monitor progress, and those indicators should be consistent

with national development policies. For countries that have formulated a PRSP, the choice of millennium development goal indicators must be consistent with indicators used to monitor PRSP goals and targets, and PRSP targets in turn should provide the intermediate means to monitor millennium development goal progress.

12. The United Nations Statistical Commission may wish to consider the need to keep some degree of flexibility to reflect national priorities and specific circumstances vis-à-vis the need to harmonize the use of indicators for global millennium development goal monitoring.

13. The millennium development goal country reports primarily address a national audience, with a clear focus on progress at the subnational level. In a sense, they help bring the millennium development goals "home". For too long, global goals and targets have remained at the global and intergovernmental levels; in too many instances, they did not make a difference in terms of policy-making, resources allocations or institutional changes at the national and subnational levels. In order to spur progress, millennium development goal work needs to focus on the national and subnational levels more than on the regional and global levels. Therefore, millennium development goal country reports focus on disaggregated data to highlight trends and disparities within the country. Disaggregation from the national level down is more important for a millennium development goal report than the concern with aggregation of national data to the regional and global levels. Global and regional databases exist independently from the millennium development goal reports and follow separate processes for updating and maintenance. The role of the millennium development goal country reports is not to service these global and regional databases. Millennium development goal reports are primarily for advocacy and communications, not for enhancing statistical rigour and accuracy.

14. In particular, the United Nations Statistical Commission may wish to consider the following two issues:

(a) The indicator to monitor the first global target of halving income-poverty between 1990 and 2015 is based on the international poverty line of one dollar a day expressed in purchasing power parity of 1985. This methodology provides a mechanism for making poverty comparisons across regions and for estimating global poverty levels and trends. They do not necessarily reflect conditions in specific countries. The relevance of $1/day as a poverty indicator for middle-income countries has also been questioned. In order to assess the incidence of income-poverty in individual countries, an allowance must be made to define a nationally relevant poverty line that reflects country-specific conditions and the level of resources needed to provide minimum acceptable living standards for its citizens, in line with the country's level of development. The United Nations Statistical Commission may wish to consider specific guidance on the use of the national poverty line for monitoring the first millennium development goal target. It may also wish to examine ways to improve the reliability of purchasing power parity conversion rates and their relevance for poverty monitoring;

(b) The indicators to monitor goal 8 (develop a global partnership for development) represents another challenge at the country level. Although the emphasis of millennium development goal reports is to monitor goals 1 through 7, achievement of these goals is contingent on the international conditions in the areas of aid, trade, debt relief and access to technology. The United Nations Statistical Commission may wish to consider the need for specific guidance to adapt the

internationally agreed indicators to monitor goal 8 into indicators that can be monitored and reported nationally as a way to assess progress towards the millennium development goals as a "global deal" and to monitor the international efforts and opportunities faced by individual countries. Tracking the indicators under goal 8 at the national level would also help countries to develop better development partnerships and coordination of donor resources.

IV. Development of statistical capacity

15. The millennium development goals provide a long-term development framework to keep the eyes of the world focused on a consistent set of goals, targets and indicators to monitor progress around numerical and time-bound targets that collectively address the many dimensions of human development. Monitoring the millennium development goals over the next 13 years will require sustained efforts to respond to the growing demand for data to inform the general public and policy makers, as well as the development community.

16. Millennium development goal monitoring provides an opportunity to develop statistical capacity within countries to improve the production and use of consistent and internationally validated data to assess results. The millennium development goal country reports include a table entitled "Capacity at a glance". For each of the targets, it indicates the existing capacity for different aspects of the monitoring process, including data gathering, data quality, data analysis, and the use of statistics in policy-making. The science behind the selection of one of the three levels of capacity (strong, fair or weak) is not perfect, but it helps national authorities and interested donor agencies to focus on relative capacity levels and to prioritize operational support.

17. Too many countries remain trapped in a vicious cycle of low demand for data, lack of resources and national efforts to produce quality data and thus lack of good data sources to design and monitor pro-poor policy reforms. The millennium development goals provide an opportunity to break that cycle by creating a consistent, long-term demand for good quality, timely and relevant data for making policy decisions, coordinating the use of available resources, identifying financial and institutional constraints to achieving results, and using statistics to keep the general public informed and interested.

18. Greater efforts to coordinate capacity development for millennium development goal monitoring and analysis will be required in order to improve the quality and timeliness of statistical data sources according to internationally approved guidelines and recommendations. Harmonization in the use of national and international indicators will require strong leadership and longer-term investment in the development of sound statistical systems and capacities. The United Nations Statistical Commission may wish to consider the following issue:

Practical ways are needed to improve the investment of national authorities and donor agencies in statistical capacity development. One critically important element will be the enhancement of the operational collaboration and coordination among the many actors and agencies in this field. The challenge is to establish specific mechanisms that will reduce fragmentation in support of nationally owned and locally driven efforts without imposing rigid and bureaucratically heavy structures that stifle innovation and creativity.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 4* (E/2002/24), chap I, sect. A.

Annex

Millennium development goal country reporting*

A. Published — as of end November 2002

Albania (English)
Armenia (English)
Bolivia (English and Spanish)
Cambodia (Khmer and English)
Cameroon (French and English)
Chad (French)
Guatemala (Spanish)
Kazakhstan (Russian and English)
Madagascar (French)
Mauritius (English)
Mozambique (English)
Nepal (Nepali and English)
Poland (Polish and English)
Saudi Arabia (English and Arabic)
Senegal (French)
United Republic of Tanzania (English)
Viet Nam (English)

B.

Country	*Date expected*
Algeria	January 2003
Argentina	May 2003
Azerbaijan	Mid-2003
Bahrain	March 2003
Barbados	2003
Bhutan	Late 2002
Bulgaria	End 2002
Central African Republic	Late 2002
Chile	March 2003
China	Late 2002
Djibouti	April 2003
Egypt	End 2002

* Available at www.undg.org and www.undp.org.

Country	*Date expected*
Georgia	Early 2004
Guyana	End 2002
Jamaica	2003
Jordan	March 2003
Kazakhstan	November 2002
Kuwait	Mid-2003
Kyrgyzstan	End 2002
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Early 2003
Latvia	July 2003
Lebanon	December 2002
Lesotho	November 2002
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Early 2003
Lithuania	Early 2003
Mongolia	November 2002
Morocco	Early 2003
Nicaragua	January 2003
Pakistan	Second half of 2002
Paraguay	Late 2002
Philippines	Late 2002
Republic of Moldova	End 2002
Romania	November 2002
Russian Federation	November 2003
Somalia	Early 2003
South Africa	End 2002
Sudan	End 2003
Syrian Arab Republic	End 2002
Tajikistan	Early 2003
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	End 2003
Togo	Mid-2003
Trinidad and Tobago	2003
Tunisia	June 2003
Turkey	Early 2004
Turkmenistan	Late 2002
Ukraine	End 2002

Country	*Date expected*
United Arab Emirates	June 2003
Uruguay	Early 2003
Uzbekistan	Early 2003
Yemen	November 2002
Yugoslavia	Early 2003